



# Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

March 5, 1998

1420 East 6th Ave.  
P.O. Box 200701  
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council  
Montana Department of Environmental Quality  
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Fisheries Division  
Endangered Species Coordinator  
Nongame Coordinator  
Kalispell Office  
Montana State Library, Helena  
MT Environmental Information Center  
Montana Audubon Council  
Green Mountain Conservation District  
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena  
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena  
Watershed Consulting, LLP  
Robert Stein, 6345 Sunrise Ct., Saline, MI 48176  
Wayne Hirst, P.O. Box 728, Libby, MT 59923

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for a Future Fisheries Project tentatively planned to restore stream channel stability and fish habitat in a reach of the East Fork Bull River located near Cabinet Gorge Reservoir.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5 P.M., April 6, 1998 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Completion of this project is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer  
Habitat Protection Bureau  
Fisheries Division

Sanders

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
Fisheries Division  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
East Fork Bull River Enhancement Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 which directs the Department to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The program involves physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purposes of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. This project is being proposed to restore stream stability and fish habitat within a 0.5 mile reach of the East Fork Bull River. Substantial erosion and channel braiding has occurred on this reach of stream following the 1997 spring runoff. This erosion and braiding was a result of past heavy logging of the floodplain adjacent to the river.

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on the East Fork of Bull River near Cabinet Gorge Reservoir within Township 27 North, Range 32 West, Section 5, 6, and 7 in Sanders County.

II. Need for the Project: Department Goal A indicates that a Fisheries Division objective is to "protect existing aquatic habitat and improve degraded stream systems for the welfare of healthy fish populations and other wildlife species and for public enjoyment and use." The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is a tool to help achieve that objective.

The East Fork Bull River provides important habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout, species of special concern in Montana, as well as for brown trout. The river, as a result of past logging practices within the riparian corridor, has abandoned its existing channel and captured an overflow channel creating substantial bank erosion and braiding. This channel instability and associated braiding has degraded fish habitat. Recent emergency work re-established flow into the original channel. However, if left unattended, a high water event could re-capture the secondary overflow channel. The proposed project would stabilize the channel elevation by installing a grade control comprised of boulders across the active floodplain and would stabilize an eroding stream bank at the head of the secondary channel by installing root wad revetment.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project calls for stabilizing the channel elevation within a 0.5 mile braided reach of the East Fork Bull River by installing a boulder grade control structure across the cobble floodplain that has been flood stripped of vegetation. The project also calls for protecting an eroding stream bank located at the head of the secondary channel by installing root wad revetment. This project is expected to cost \$7,100.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$5,325.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Restoring a braided reach of stream channel would act to reduce sediment inputs from erodible banks and would help to maintain stable pool-riffle sequences for fish habitat. Expected improvements in aquatic habitat, as well as improved access to habitat found in the upper watershed, should help to maintain or enhance fish populations.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction will occur during a low flow period and operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. A permit for a short term exemption from turbidity will be obtained from the Water Quality Bureau and a 310 permit will be obtained from the local Conservation District. In the long term, measures used to stabilize this braided reach would act to reduce the sediment contribution to downstream areas, thereby improving the overall quality of downstream waters.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

No effects on geology and soils are expected above the high water mark. Below the high water mark, the project is expected to stabilize the stream channel.

5. Aesthetics.

Aesthetics will be enhanced by restoring a braided reach of stream to a healthy and more natural stream environment.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project will likely require an individual Army Corp of Engineers (COE) 404 permit. Therefore, the State Historic Preservation Office has been contacted to determine the need for compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

It is anticipated that the proposed project would maintain or enhance bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout, both species of special concern in Montana. Additionally, the proposed project would maintain or enhance brown trout recruitment to Cabinet Gorge Reservoir. Consequently, the project is expected to maintain or enhance the brown trout fishery in the reservoir.

## VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

### 1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this braided reach of the East Fork Bull River would remain unstable. Channel instability would result in continued bank erosion, excess sediment loading, channel aggradation and loss of channel capacity. Fish habitat and associated populations of bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout and brown trout would likely become degraded.

### 2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to restore the stability of a braided reach of the East Fork Bull River. Preventing additional channel braiding from occurring and stabilizing erodible stream banks will provide for better spawning and rearing habitat for bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout and brown trout. Restoration of the channel to a more stable stream environment also would reduce sediment inputs to downstream areas. This alternative would maintain or improve aquatic habitat, aesthetics and water quality within the project area.

## VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

### 1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

### 2. Level of public involvement.

The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and will be contingent upon their approval. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA will be published on the Montana Electronic Bulletin Board.

### 3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5 P.M. on April 6, 1998.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer  
Habitat Protection Bureau  
Fisheries Division  
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
1420 East 6th Avenue  
Helena, MT 59620

Telephone: (406) 444-2432

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS  
1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701  
(406) 444-2535

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title East Fork Bull River Enhancement Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project This project is being proposed to restore stream stability and fish habitat within a 0.5 mile reach of the East Fork Bull River. Substantial erosion and channel braiding occurred on this reach of stream during the 1997 spring runoff. This erosion and braiding was a result of past heavy logging of the floodplain adjacent to the river.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats		X				X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality				X		X
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals				X		
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping

jurisdiction Green Mountain Conservation District, NRCS, Army Corp of  
Engineers

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Watershed Consulting,  
LLP

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by : Mark Lere

Date: March 5, 1998